



**Green  
Government**

An initiative of the National Association of Counties

# Greening County Events Tip Sheet

## ● Introduction

Greening your county meeting or event encompasses all aspects of the planning process. Decisions you make at every planning level can impact the environment. By making informed decisions you can save energy, reduce emissions, and prevent waste. Though it may seem overwhelming and costly at first, greening your county meetings and events does not have to mean higher expenses. In fact, the effort may very well help save taxpayer dollars.

In this tip sheet, all steps of the meeting planning process will be highlighted including:

- meeting location;
- transportation;
- materials and recycling;
- food and beverage;
- guest services; and
- education.

Tips are divided below into internal meetings (meetings held within regular daily county operations and in county facilities) and external meetings (conferences, fairs, and other large-scale community events).



Clackamas County Oregon Recycling Bins

Following every tip in this sheet may not be practical for your county. When greening your meetings and events, starting small can still yield significant environmental and financial savings. Try beginning with just a few things that your county can easily accomplish.

## ● Internal Meetings

Here is a checklist for internal meetings that may include department staff meetings, board meetings, and other meetings located in county facilities

\*Please note: Not all items in the following list may be applicable. A combination of both internal and external tips may be applicable to the meeting you are planning.

### Meeting Location

Choosing a green meeting space can play a large role in helping to reduce costs, energy, and emissions. By selecting venues that are energy efficient and that allow attendees to minimize travel, you can eliminate unnecessary expenses and pollutants.

- ☐ Choose an appropriate venue for your event that demonstrates your county's green commitment (see additional resources section for more information).
- ☐ Choose rooms with energy saving features such as motion-sensor lights and lights fitted with compact fluorescent light bulbs (CFLs).
- ☐ Choose rooms with automatic temperature controlled heating and air systems.
- ☐ Choose rooms that are equipped with computer data projectors and projection screens to prevent use of paper documents.

### Transportation

The transportation your attendees may use to arrive at your meeting can contribute to greenhouse gas emissions and local air pollution. Encouraging the use of green transportation can help to decrease the demand for foreign oil. A regular rush-hour driver wastes an average of 99 gallons of gasoline

a year due to traffic, according to the Center for Transportation Excellence.

- ☐ Promote the use of fuel efficient vehicles or vehicles run on alternative fuels.
- ☐ Encourage carpooling to work.
- ☐ Publicize routes for biking or walking to the meeting.
- ☐ Subsidize subway cards or bus passes for public transportation.

### Materials and Recycling

Reducing unnecessary meeting materials will reduce paper consumption, limit the amount of waste entering landfills, and save in meeting costs.

- ☐ Print double sided on post-consumer recycled paper.
- ☐ Avoid colored paper and those with heavy ink coverage or special coatings that are difficult to recycle.
- ☐ Print with ink from vegetable sources, which emit lower volatile organic compounds (VOCs).
- ☐ Reduce the amount of handouts and make them available online and/or in a PowerPoint presentation.
- ☐ Announce the locations of recycling bins.
- ☐ Provide readily accessible recycling bins in multiple locations. Contact your local recycling coordinator to ask about a loan program for recycling bins.
- ☐ Mark the recycling bins with highly visible signage that defines exactly what materials can be recycled.

### Food and Beverage

Making strategic choices in the food we eat and how we eat it helps to lessen the burden on available resources.

- ☐ Use only china or glass (non-disposable) catering plates, cups and glasses.

**NACO** National Association of Counties  
The Voice of America's Counties

## Marin County, CA:

In 2008, Marin County, California held the “Greenest County Fair on Earth.” The fair included all of the normal features of a county fair such as carnival rides, fireworks, and arts and crafts as well as green exhibits, contests, and workshops.

Marin County hosted a variety of contests including a light bulb competition where individuals took an old fluorescent light bulb and turned it into a work of art; a backyard compost competition where attendees’ soil was measured by experts; and a competition where attendees created chairs made out of recycled materials. Attendees also toured the “Ultimate Green Home” featuring environmentally-friendly bedding, cabinets, water heaters, and toilets.

All indoor facilities used low volatile organic compounds (VOCs) paint and voltage track lighting. For all display tables, cloth covers instead of vinyl were used. Additionally, the indoor facilities featured inspirational green quotes on reusable banners.

Green Talk Workshops were held five times a day. The topics ranged from using solar in the home, backyard composting, and converting your car to biodiesel. A community sound stage was powered by photovoltaic solar panels and a helix wind

turbine shown at the fair entrance helped to provide a significant amount of power for fair activities. Fair organizers also provided attendees with interactive displays on how to reduce one’s carbon footprint. Information provided on bicycle commuting included the easiest paths and roads for travel.

The fair also featured a farmer’s market where a local chef was paired with a local farmer. The chef shared recipes and presented meals. All operators were required to use biodegradable and compostable products and the leftover cooking oil from the vendors was converted to biodiesel. Additionally, compostables were collected and turned into furnished compost, which will be used next year at the fairgrounds as a soil amendment. Waste diversion centers were positioned at various points throughout the fair and were staffed by student volunteers.

Finally, pedometers were available at the fairground entrance for attendees. Each person could record the steps they took throughout the fair and for every 2,000 steps could enter a raffle to win a bicycle. Fair-goers were also given the option to fill out a “green footprint” on which they listed a lifestyle change to become more environmentally friendly. The footprints were then posted a city bus that will run for a year to remind attendees of their pledge

the meeting does not stop when attendees leave. Teaching your attendees about your green efforts can help spread green practices throughout your community.

- ☐ Provide attendees with information about the green practices at the event.
- ☐ Share information about the recycling/waste prevention program in place.
- ☐ Ask attendees for feedback and ideas on how to make your event greener.
- ☐ Provide information for attendees about changes they can make in their daily lives to go green.

## External Meetings

Here is a checklist for external meetings which may include county fairs, conferences, large community wide events, and other meetings located outside county facilities

\*Please note: Not all items in the following list may be applicable. A combination of both internal and external tips may be applicable to the meeting you are planning.

### Meeting Location

Choosing a green meeting space can play a large role in helping to reduce costs, energy, and emissions. By selecting venues that are energy efficient and that allow attendees to minimize travel, you can eliminate unnecessary expenses and pollutants.

- ☐ Choose an appropriate venue for your event that demonstrates your county’s

- ☐ Use sporks (utensils that are both a spoon and fork) or spudware (utensils made from potatoes) in lieu of basic plastic silverware.
- ☐ Use cloth napkins.
- ☐ Use coasters instead of cocktail napkins.
- ☐ Serve water in pitchers with glasses rather than individual plastic bottles.
- ☐ Use organic or local food where possible and serve fair trade and/or organic coffee.
- ☐ Serve salt, sugar, pepper, cream, and other condiments in bulk containers, not individual packages.
- ☐ Confirm meeting numbers before placing a food and beverage order to limit the amount of wasted food.
- ☐ Serve buffet style so that attendees can take what they really will eat.

## Education

An important aspect to greening your county meeting or event is sharing your efforts with attendees. This way, the green part of



Marin County California Fair





Marin County California Fair

green commitment (see additional resources section for more information).

- ☐ Choose hotels/meeting venues accessible by public transportation.
- ☐ Choose a meeting venue where “free time” activities (i.e. dining, shopping) are in walking distance.
- ☐ Choose a destination with minimal travel requirements on the greatest number of attendees.
- ☐ Choose a venue that would allow a teleconference choice for those unable to travel.
- ☐ Ask if the venue has an energy-efficient purchasing policy and request a copy.
- ☐ Ask that the venue turn off lights and air conditioning when the meeting space is not in use.

## Transportation

The transportation your attendees may use to arrive at your meeting can contribute to greenhouse gas emissions and local air pollution. Encouraging the use of green transportation can help to decrease the demand for foreign oil. A regular rush-hour driver wastes an average of 99 gallons of gasoline a year due to traffic, according to the Center for Transportation Excellence.

- ☐ Provide subway cards or bus passes for public transportation.

- ☐ Distribute maps for public transportation.
- ☐ If choosing the transportation for attendees, pick a vehicle running on alternative fuels.
- ☐ If air travel is required, recommend an airline with a sound environmental program.
- ☐ Book flights with airlines that recycle the waste created when serving food and beverages to passengers.

## Materials and Recycling

Reducing unnecessary meeting materials will reduce paper consumption, limit the amount of waste entering landfills, and save in meeting costs.

- ☐ Choose recycled-content promotional

products when deciding on pens, bags, shirts and caps, and awards.

- ☐ Request all handouts be printed on two sides using post-consumer recycled paper.
- ☐ Request that documents be printed from vegetable sources, which emit lower amounts of volatile organic compounds (VOCs). VOCs contain a variety of chemicals that are harmful to health and can cause indoor air pollution.
- ☐ Ask presenters to avoid colored paper and those with heavy ink coverage or special coatings that are more difficult to recycle.
- ☐ Ask presenters to reduce the amount of handouts by putting them online, on a disk or jump drive, and/or in a PowerPoint presentation.
- ☐ Collect name tags for reuse.
- ☐ Announce the locations of recycling bins.
- ☐ Provide readily accessible recycling bins in multiple locations. Contact your local recycling coordinator to ask about a loan program for recycling bins.
- ☐ Mark the recycling bins with highly visible signage that defines exactly what materials can be recycled.
- ☐ Enlist volunteers to help facilitate recycling.

## Food and Beverage

Making strategic choices in the food we eat and how we eat it helps to lessen the burden on available resources.

- ☐ Ask delegates to sign-up for meals, by letting you know which meals they will be attending as well as the meal size. This will reduce food waste and cost.
- ☐ Request buffet style instead of plated or bagged/boxed meals to reduce food waste.

## Arlington County, VA:

Arlington County, Virginia operates a Special Events Recycling Program requiring all events with over 100 participants to recycle. The organizers are provided with a brochure with step-by-step guidance on how to set up recycling for their event. Each event organizer must complete a Special Events application which includes how they are handling recycling and trash. As part of the county's effort to support the events, the county purchased several Clear-Stream recycling containers to loan out to

event coordinators to display and use at their events. The events range from school sporting events, community gatherings, the Arlington County Fair, races, and festivals.

Arlington County is home to the Marine Corps Marathon which hosts over 100,000 spectators and 22,000 runners. Each year the event captures approximately two tons of plastic and cardboard. Arlington County continues to work with the Marine Corps and their vendors on waste reduction and recycling to make the marathon an even “greener” event.

## Clackamas County, OR:

Clackamas County, Oregon began their "Recycling in Public Places" program as a response to lack of available recycling venues in parks, events, and schools. The county purchased a ClearStream recycler (a portable recycling bin). The containers are, according to the county, relatively inexpensive and easy to transport. Clackamas County has devised a system for community groups to borrow the bins to use at fairs, farmers markets, concerts, athletic events, and other such events

- ☐ Request catering plates, cups and glasses to be china or glass (non-disposable).
- ☐ Use regular silverware or, in lieu of basic plastic utensils, use biodegradable disposables, sporks (utensils that are both a spoon and fork) or spudware (utensils made from potatoes).
- ☐ Serve sugar, salt, pepper, cream and other condiments in bulk containers, not individual servings, to save packaging.
- ☐ Request the use of cloth napkins whenever possible and provide paper napkins only upon request.
- ☐ Request the use of coasters instead of cocktail napkins.
- ☐ Request that all snacks are served in a bowl or on a plate instead of individually-wrapped packages.
- ☐ Request all leftover food be donated to a local food bank or other charity.
- ☐ Serve water in pitchers with glasses rather than individual plastic bottles.
- ☐ Request the use of organic or local food where possible, and serve fair trade and/or organic coffee.
- ☐ Provide attendees with event mugs to be reused every day for water/coffee service.
- ☐ Direct attendees to water fountains to refill their cups.

### Guest Services

The choices you make concerning your attendees' accommodations can impact the environment. By encouraging hotels and guests to make energy efficient choices, event planners can reduce the amount of wasted water, energy, and products.

- ☐ Ensure the hotel has a paperless check-in and check-out process for guests.
- ☐ Ask the hotel not to change the sheets and towels daily unless requested by the guest.
- ☐ Ask the hotel not to replace the amenities daily unless they are gone.
- ☐ Request that housekeeping staff shut blinds and turn down the heat/air conditioning during the day in rooms while attendees are gone.
- ☐ Determine if the hotel or facility uses green cleaning products.
- ☐ Provide the attendee with a card instructing them on how to be green in their hotel rooms.

### Education

An important aspect to greening your county meeting or event is sharing your efforts with attendees. This way, the green part of the meeting does not stop when attendees leave. Teaching your attendees about your green efforts can help spread green practices throughout your community

- ☐ Provide attendees with information in advance about the green practices in place at the event.
- ☐ Include information in program materials about the recycling and waste prevention efforts in place.
- ☐ Include information about the green components of the event at general sessions.
- ☐ Provide opportunities for feedback and participation in a green events dialogue.



*Marin County California Fair*

Visit [www.greencounties.org](http://www.greencounties.org)



## ● Additional Resources

### ● Blue Green Meetings

[www.bluegreenmeetings.org](http://www.bluegreenmeetings.org)

Blue Green Meetings, an initiative sponsored by the Oceans Blue Foundation, provides advice on green meetings for both hosts and planners and suppliers. The website includes examples of green meetings and a quiz to see how green your meeting is.

### ● Convention Industry Council's Green Meetings Report

[www.conventionindustry.org/projects/green\\_meetings\\_report.pdf](http://www.conventionindustry.org/projects/green_meetings_report.pdf)

The Convention Industry Council, charged with coming up with best practices for green meetings, developed a report for event planners and suppliers.

### ● ENERGY STAR

[www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=business.bus\\_bldgs](http://www.energystar.gov/index.cfm?c=business.bus_bldgs)

The ENERGY STAR is the national symbol for energy efficiency in America. Since the ENERGY STAR for commercial buildings was first introduced in 1999, thousands of buildings across the country have earned the ENERGY STAR and are saving billions in energy costs. Commercial buildings that have earned the ENERGY STAR use on average 35% less energy than typical similar buildings and generate one-third less carbon dioxide. Increasing concern about the financial and environmental risks associated with climate change is driving more organizations to strive for the ENERGY STAR for their buildings, as it is seen as a symbol of an organization that is working to reduce global warming and its impacts.

### ● GNP Green Gear

[www.gnpgreengear.com/](http://www.gnpgreengear.com/)

GNP Specialties, Inc., a promotional company geared towards event planning, offers a special "green gear" line that features tote bags, flash drives, water bottles, and other environmentally friendly products.

### ● Green Hotels

[www.greenhotels.com](http://www.greenhotels.com)

The Green Hotels Association states its goal as bringing together hotels interested in environmental issues. The website includes a list of certified green hotels in every state, tips for participants, and a checklist for hotels to complete describing their green practices.

### ● Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED)

[www.usgbc.org/leed](http://www.usgbc.org/leed)

The Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Green Building Rating System™ encourages and accelerates global adoption of sustainable green building and development practices. LEED is a third-party certification program and the nationally accepted benchmark for the design, construction and operation of high performance green buildings. LEED gives building owners and op-

erators the tools they need to have an immediate and measurable impact on their buildings' performance. LEED promotes a whole-building approach to sustainability by recognizing performance in five key areas of human and environmental health: sustainable site development, water savings, energy efficiency, materials selection and indoor environmental quality.

### ● NAHBGreen

[www.nahbgreen.org](http://www.nahbgreen.org)

As the voice of America's housing industry, the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) promotes policies that keep housing a national priority. The NAHB National Green Building Program™ encourages mainstream green residential construction and site development through the rigorous yet flexible NAHB Model Green Home Building Guidelines and the ICC-700 National Green Building Standard, the cost-effective National Green Building Certification administered by the NAHB Research Center, and the Certified Green Professional™ national training curriculum focused on practical green construction techniques. Homes scored to the NAHBGreen-endorsed rating systems must receive points in all green categories: lot design, resource and material efficiency, energy efficiency, water efficiency, indoor environmental quality and homeowner education.

### ● National Recycling Coalition's Green Meeting's Policy

[www.nrc-recycle.org/greenmeetingsp.aspx](http://www.nrc-recycle.org/greenmeetingsp.aspx)

The National Recycling Coalition has developed a Green Meeting's Policy that provides information on greening your meeting. The policy focuses mostly on large conferences and events and also provides a list of green resources and a sample facility evaluation survey.

### ● Professional Marketing Services Incorporated

[www.companycatalog.com/main4.asp?url=pmsi](http://www.companycatalog.com/main4.asp?url=pmsi)

Professional Marketing Services, Inc., also offers a line of recycled products including portfolios, notepads, and lanyards. The website has a separate page for green meetings.

### ● Sustain Lane

[www.sustainlane.com/us-city-rankings/](http://www.sustainlane.com/us-city-rankings/)

Sustain Lane, a "web-guide" devoted to sustainable living, ranked the "greenest" cities in the United States. Sustain Lane ranked the 50 most populous cities using a formula that includes measuring transportation, water, waste management, and air quality, among other factors, for sustainability.

### ● Weisenbach Recycled Products

[www.recycledproducts.com/](http://www.recycledproducts.com/)

Weisenbach Recycled Products provides a variety of recycled goods for use including awards, pens, name tags, and paper. The company makes all of their products with recycled and environmentally preferable materials.

## About the NACo Green Government Initiative

The NACo Green Government Initiative serves as a catalyst between local governments and the private sector to facilitate green government practices, products and policies that result in financial and environmental savings. Launched in 2007, the Initiative provides comprehensive resources for local governments on all things green, including energy, green building, air quality, transportation, water quality, land use, purchasing and recycling.

For more information contact Kelly Zonderwyk, NACo Senior Community Services Associate, at 202.942.4224 or [kzonderwyk@naco.org](mailto:kzonderwyk@naco.org).



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